

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith FULL TEXT RAY VICKER OP-ED PAGE COLUMN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL FRIDAY AUGUST 6 HEADED "DISASTER FOR THE PALESTINIANS."
2. A FRIEND OF MINE, A PALESTINIAN ON THE FACULTY OF THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT, IS A CHANGED MAN THESE DAYS.
3. IN EARLY 1975, WHEN THE UNIVERSITY WAS STILL OPEN, HE WAS ON THE TOP OF THE WORLD. YASIR ARAFAT, THE LEADER OF THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION, HAD JUST APPEARED IN TRIUMPH BEFORE THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN NEW YORK AND SCORES OF NATIONS HAD RECOGNIZED THE PALESTINIANS AS POSSESSING A STATELESS ENTITY. IT SEEMED ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE ISRAEL WOULD BE FORCED BY WORLD OPINION TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE PALESTINIANS OR RISK OSTRACISM.
4. MY FRIEND USED TO HOLD FORTH IN THE STUDENT LOUNGE ABOUT THE ORANGE GROVE NEAR HAIFA HIS FAMILY USED TO OWN. "I WILL UNCLASSIFIED

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BE GOING BACK," HE SAID WITH CONVICTION. "I AM MORE CONFIDENT OF THAT NOW THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE OUR FAMILY LEFT IN 1948."

5. THE OTHER DAY WHEN I ENCOUNTERED THE PROFESSOR AGAIN, HE SEEMED ODDLY DIMINISHED. HIS CAMPUS HAS BEEN CLOSED DOWN FOR MONTHS BY THE CHAOS IN BEIRUT AND HE WAS LIVING IN A SMALL APARTMENT IN PLO-CONTROLLED WEST BEIRUT AND WAS READY TO ABANDON THAT, TOO, IF THE SHELLING GOT MUCH WORSE. AND HIS PLANS FOR RETURNING TO HAIFA? "NOT IN MY LIFETIME," HE SAID SADLY. "IT WILL BE FOR MY CHILDREN."

6. THE PLO INDEED IS A WEAKENED FORCE, UNLIKELY TO BE MARCHING FAR IN ANY DIRECTION FOR A WHILE. ITS STRENGTH HAS BEEN DRAINED BY ITS HEADSTRONG INTERVENTION INTO LEBANESE POLITICS. AND, IN THE SHORT RUN, ISRAEL IS THE BIG GAINER. ANY POSSIBILITY OR NEED OF ITS NEGOTIATING WITH THE PALESTINIANS--AT LEAST WITH THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP--IS ABOUT GONE.

7. THE SWIFT TURN OF EVENTS HAS PLACED THE PRESENT PLO LEADERSHIP IN AN ALMOST UNTENABLE POSITION. A SYRIAN BLOCKADE HAS CUT WEAPONRY. PALESTINIAN GUERRILLA FORCES HAVE BEEN DECIMATED. THEIR FREEDOM OF ACTION IN LEBANON IS LIKELY TO BE FURTHER LIMITED BY THE SYRIA-IMPOSED PEACE PLAN NOW SHAPING UP.

8. ALL THIS HAS SERVED TO FURTHER WEAKEN THEIR NEGOTIATION CREDIBILITY WITH ISRAEL. IF THE PALESTINIANS CAN'T GET ALONG WITH CHRISTIANS IN LEBANON, ISRAELIS MAY ASK, HOW COULD THEY EVER GET ALONG WITH ISRAELIS SHOULD THE PALESTINIANS EVER HAVE THEIR OWN STATE ON THE WEST BANK OF THE JORDAN RIVER AND IN GAZA?

9. THE FIASCO OF THE AIRPLANE HIJACKING IN UGANDA IS ANOTHER MATTER. YET IT FITS INTO THE LEBANESE RESULTS PICTURE, TOO. A FEW MONTHS AGO PALESTINIANS WERE STANDING ON THEIR CAREFULLY STRUCTURED IMAGE OF DIGNIFIED MODERATES WILLING TO NEGOTIATE WITH A STUBBORNLY RECALCITRANT ISRAEL. NOW THE PALESTINIAN IMAGE IS ONE OF BUNGLERS WHO THINK NOTHING OF INNOCENT LIVES AS THEY PLOT MURDEROUS FORAYS. SIGNIFICANTLY, NONE OF THE PLO GROUPS WANTS TO ADMIT ANY UNCLASSIFIED

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CONNECTION WITH THE AFFAIR. THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A DOZEN CLAIMED FATHERS TO THE DEED HAD IT SUCCEEDED. EVIDENCE, HOWEVER, POINTS TO THE POPULAR FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE, LED BY DR. GEORGE HABBASH, A RENOWNED TERRORIST, OR A SPLINTER GROUP OF HIS ORGANIZATION.

10. SYRIA, OF COURSE, PLAYED A KEY PART IN THE PALESTINIAN DEFEAT. ITS "PEACEMAKING" EFFORTS HAVE PLACED IT ON THE SIDE OF CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS WHICH HAD BEEN ALMOST CRUSHED WHEN THIS YEAR STARTED. THEN, IN AN AMAZING COMBACK STAGED WITH SYRIAN HELP, RIGHT-WING MARONITE CHRISTIANS HAVE BEEN SMASHING THE LEFTIST MOSLEM FORCES. AND THE PLO SUFFERED ALONG WITH ITS DUBIOUS LEFTIST "ALLIES."

11. NATURALLY THE SYRIANS ARE BEING BLAMED FOR WHAT'S HAPPENED IN A TIDE OF PLO INVECTIVE POURING FROM ITS BELEAGUERED STRONGHOLDS IN BEIRUT, SIDON AND OTHER LEBANESE CITIES. HOWEVER, ANY ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION SHOWS THAT THE PLO IS FULLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BAD THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING TO IT

12. OVER 300,000 PALESTINIANS WERE IN THE COUNTRY AT THE START OF THE CIVIL WAR. ABOUT 60,000 OF THEM LIVED IN CAMPS WHICH HAD BECOME ARMED, INDEPENDENT FIEFS AROUND BEIRUT, TRIPOLI AND ELSEWHERE.

13. ALMOST FROM THE FIRST, THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT IN SYRIA WAS WARNING PALESTINIANS THAT LEBANON WOULD BE A QUAGMIRE FOR THEM IF THEY BECAME INVOLVED IN THE COUNTRY'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. MONTHS AGO IN DAMASCUS, AHMED ISKANDER AHMED, SYRIA'S MINISTER OF INFORMATION, TOLD ME WITH CONSIDERABLE AGITATION, "IT WOULD BE SUICIDAL FOR THE PALESTINIANS TO BECOME INVOLVED IN LEBANESE POLITICS. AS AN ANTI-ISRAEL FORCE, THE PLO ENJOYS SUPPORT AND RESPECT THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD. IF IT INTERVENES IN LEBANON, IT BECOMES JUST ONE MORE POLITICAL PARTY OF MANY IN LEBANON."

14. YET INTERVENE THEY DID. PERHAPS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO AVOID BEING DRAWN IN. AFTER ALL, ONE OF THE CAUSES OF THE WAR WAS THE DEMAND BY THE CHRISTIAN MARONITES THAT PALESTINIANS BE BROUGHT UNDER LEBANESE GOVERN-
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MENT CONTROL.

15. STILL, HAD THE PLO SHOWN MORE DISCIPLINE AS EVENTS UNFOLDED, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A DIFFERENT STORY. YET ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH THE LONG PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE TO REGAIN LOST LANDS FROM ISRAEL CAN'T HELP NOTICE AN INHERENT FEATURE IN THEIR CHARACTER WHICH SOMETIMES RESULTS IN SUICIDAL ACTS. ONE FACTOR, OF COURSE, IS THE COMPLEX STRUCTURE OF THE PLO ITSELF, A BLANKET ORGANIZATION MADE UP OF YASIR ARAFAT'S AL FATAH, BIGGEST OF THE GROUPS, THE PFLP, THE PFLP GENERAL COMMAND, THE ARAB LIBERATION FRONT, THE FRONT FOR THE POPULAR PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE AND OTHERS.

16. THE SPLINTER ORGANIZATIONS ARE POLITICALLY TO THE LEFT, SOMETIMES FAR TO THE LEFT OF AL FATAH. DR. HABBASH'S GROUP, FOR INSTANCE, PREACHES THAT THE "ENEMY" IS NOT ONLY ISRAEL BUT CAPITALISM, U.S. IMPERIALISM AND ALL THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THESE SPLINTER FACTIONS DRAW STRENGTH AND MONEY FROM LIBYA AND IRAQ PLUS EITHER THE SOVIET UNION OR CHINA.

17. STILL ANOTHER FACTION, THE SAI'QA, THE SECOND LARGEST GUERRILLA GROUP IN THE PLO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, IS SAID TO

BE CONTROLLED BY THE SYRIAN ARMY ITSELF AND THE SYRIANS ARE REPORTEDLY GROOMING ITS LEADER, ZOHEIR MOHSEIN, TO TAKE OVER THE PLO FROM MR. ARAFAT. ONCE OR TWICE SAI'QA HAS FOUGHT PITCHED BATTLES WITH AL FATAH FORCES, ONE GROUP OF PALESTINIANS VS. ANOTHER, WHICH HASN'T ADDED TO PLO'S PRESTIGE.

18. THE SINAI AGREEMENT ENGINEERED BY SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY KISSINGER WITH HIS STEP-BY-STEP DIPLOMACY FURTHER DIVIDED THE PLO JUST AS IT DIVIDED THE ARAB WORLD. LEFTISTS ALREADY HAD FORMED A "REJECTIONIST FRONT," BARRING ANY RECOGNITION OF THE EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL. THE SINAI AGREEMENT PROVIDED THIS WING OF THE PLO WITH AMMUNITION TO CONDEMN NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL. AL FATAH DIDN'T LIKE THE AGREEMENT EITHER, BUT THERE STILL WERE SOME MODERATES AMONG THIS GROUP WHO BELIEVED THAT DIPLOMACY MIGHT ACHIEVE MORE THAN VIOLENCE.

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19. MEANWHILE IN LEBANON, THE FIGHTING SETTLED INTO NOT JUST A MARONITE CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM PATTERN BUT INTO ONE INVOLVING THE HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS, THE IDEOLOGICAL RIGHT AND THE LEFT. LEBANON'S LEFT IS LED BY KAMAL JUMBLATT, A MYSTICAL DRUZE LEADER WHO HEADS A FEUDAL FIEF IN THE LEBANESE FOOTHILLS EVEN AS HE SPOUTS SOCIALIST DOCTRINES TO HIS FOLLOWERS.

20. HE IS A CLEVER POLITICIAN WHO HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN PUBLIC LIFE SINCE THE 1940S, ALWAYS TRYING TO START A LEFTWARD SWING IN THE COUNTRY AND NEVER RECEIVING QUITE ENOUGH SUPPORT FOR IT. HIS PARTY HAD 10 MEMBERS OF THE 99 IN THE LAST CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES. HE ALSO HAD ONE OF THE SEVERAL PRIVATE ARMIES WHICH POLITICAL LEADERS IN LEBANON CONSIDER TO BE A NECESSARY ADJUNCT OF THEIR POWER. THIS ARMY WENT INTO BATTLE FOR LEADER JUMBLATT'S IDEAS.

21. ONCE THE FIGHTING STARTED, OTHER LEFTIST GROUPS HURRIED INTO THE FRAY. MR. JUMBLATT BEGAN TO SPEAK FOR ALL OF THEM. THE REJECTIONIST FRONT CERTAINLY NEEDED NO PERSUASION TO JOIN THE WAR, ALLIED WITH LOCAL LEBANESE LEFTISTS. THEY SAW THE STRUGGLE AS A CHANCE TO NOT ONLY TOPPLE CAPITALISM IN LEBANON BUT TO PROVE ALL THEIR THEORIES ABOUT FIRST BRINGING ABOUT A LEFTIST REVOLUTION AMONG ARAB REGIMES BEFORE TAKING ON ISRAEL.

22. THAT FRIGHTENED SOME OF THE CONSERVATIVE ARAB STATES SUCH AS KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES.

THEY HAD AS MANY REASONS AS HAS SYRIA TO FEAR FORMATION OF A FAR LEFT STATE IN THE MIDEAST WHICH MIGHT BECOME A FOCUS FOR PALESTINIANS NOW WORKING IN THE OIL-RICH ARAB

STATES.

23. PLO LEADER ARAFAT WAS IN A DILEMMA. HE HAS NO IDEOLOGY OTHER THAN ANTI-ZIONISM. LEFTISTS SUCH AS DR. HABBASH WERE HIS BITTER ENEMIES WHO WOULD LIKE TO SEIZE CONTROL OF THE WHOLE PLO. MR. ARAFAT HAD NO REASON FOR THROWING IN HIS LOT WITH SUCH BEDFELLOWS. IF AL FATAH COULD HAVE SOMEHOW REMAINED ABOVE THE CONFLICT, PERHAPS THE STRENGTH OF THE MILITANT LEFT WITHIN THE PLO WOULD HAVE BEEN DISS-
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PATED AGAINST CHRISTIANS. MR. ARAFAT MIGHT HAVE EMERGED AS THE STATESMAN-LEADER, THE MAN OF MODERATION WITH AN ARMY BEHIND HIM.

24. IT WAS A SITUATION WHICH REQUIRED POLITICAL FINESSE AND DIPLOMACY, THE ABILITY TO PERSUADE CHRISTIAN MARONITES TO LET THE CAMPS ALONE WITHOUT THRUSTING MILITARY FORCES INTO LEBANON'S POLITICAL MIRE. THIS WAS A TASK FOR AN ARAB KISSINGER. THE PLO LEADERSHIP DIDN'T MEASURE UP TO THE TASK.

25. INITIALLY, THE LEFT SCORED MOST OF THE VICTORIES. CHRISTIANS WERE PUSHED INTO AN EVER-DIMINISHING ENCLAVE. AND THEN MR. JUMBLATT MADE HIS MISTAKE. WITH THE MARONITE CHRISTIANS WHIPPED, HE REFUSED TO TALK PEACE WITH THEM. HIS DREAM OF A LEFTIST LEBANON SEEMED ABOUT TO BE REALIZED AND HE DIDN'T WANT ANY COMPROMISES WHICH MIGHT DILUTE IT. LIBYA AND IRAQ WERE POURING MONEY AND ARMS TO HIS FORCES. NOTHING SEEMED IN HIS WAY.

26. SO THE CHRISTIANS DUG IN FOR A FIGHT TO THE FINISH. WHEN AN ALARMED SYRIA OFFERED ITS SERVICES AS A PEACEMAKER, THE CHRISTIANS WELCOMED THE OFFER. SYRIA'S REAL PURPOSE WAS TO HALT THE LEFTWARD TREND IN LEBANON. SYRIA DIDN'T WANT ANY FAR LEFT, RADICALLY ANTI-ZIONIST LEBANON ON ITS FLANK. SUCH A NATION COULD BE IN A WAR WITH ISRAEL SHORTLY, DRAGGING SYRIA INTO IT, TOO.

27. AS ORDER COLLAPSED IN LEBANON, AL FATAH FORCES BEGAN TO POLICE WHOLE SECTIONS OF THE COUNTRY. FROM POLICING THEY MOVED TO COOPERATING WITH LEFTISTS IN ACTIONS AGAINST MARONITE CHRISTIANS. WHETHER OR NOT THE INTENTION WAS THERE, LEADER ARAFAT WAS ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE FENCE FROM SYRIA, A KEY COUNTRY FOR PALESTINIANS INsofaras ISRAEL IS CONCERNED.

28. THE SYRIAN BLOCKADE MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE HAS BEEN DRAINING LEFTIST AND PALESTINIAN STRENGTH. MEANWHILE, THE MARONITES HAVE BEEN RECEIVING ALL THE ARMS AND MUNITIONS NECESSARY FROM SYRIA, FROM AN ISRAEL WHICH HAS MUCH TO GAIN FROM A DEFEATED PLO, AND FROM UNNAMED SUPPLIERS.

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SO THE LEFT HAS BEEN GOING STEADILY DOWNHILL.

29. EVENTS NOW POINT TOWARD A SYRIAN-DOMINATED PEACE CON-
CLAVE CHAIRED BY LEBANESE PRESIDENT-ELECT ELIAS SARKIS.
THERE ARE LIKELY TO BE LEBANESE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS
INTRODUCED WHICH WILL GIVE MOSLEMS A GREATER SHARE OF POWER
THAN THEY HAD BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR.

30. BUT THE PALESTINIANS MAY BE ON A LEASH HELD BY SYRIANS.
THERE COULD BE A POWER STRUGGLE IN THE PLO LEADERSHIP AND
PAST HISTORY SHOWS SUCH STRUGGLES MAY BE SPLINTERING. AT
THE MOMENT THE PLO IS A SPENT FORCE INsofar AS ISRAEL IS
CONCERNED. AS FOR THE FUTURE, THE PLO STILL AWAITS ITS
SIMON BOLIVAR. END TEXT. HABIB

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